

A new team for rural mental health promotion—linking sports clubs and local services

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In 2009 Nicholas Tolhurst joined the Australian Drug Foundation in the new position as Mental Health Manager, specifically to develop the Good Sports, Good Mental Health—Build Your Game program in rural Victoria and New South Wales. Before this Nick was Senior Program Manager Public Health at *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, developing their work in a diverse range of portfolios, including: rural populations; men; older people; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and e-health (or online therapy). A major part of his work at *beyondblue* was responding to mental health needs in drought-affected rural communities. Nick represented *beyondblue* on key stakeholder bodies such as the NSW Farmers' Association Mental Health Committee. Nick has extensive health promotion and education experience with the Victorian Government, starting with drink-driver re-education in the late 70s and ending with managing programs with the Office of Senior Victorians. In this capacity he ran the International Year of Older People 1999 for Victoria and later managed the Victorian Seniors Festival and Victorian Seniors Card, before moving to *beyondblue* in 2006. In late 2010 Nick took on the management of the Australian Drug Foundation's Australian Defence Forces Alcohol Management Strategy program, which will see him working with Defence Force bases and local communities around Australia.

Elle Milne moved from Perth to live in country Victoria, attracted by opportunity to work with rural communities. Elle has a Bachelor in Exercise and Sports Science (minor Preventive Health) Notre Dame University Western Australia. This degree plus a Certificate III in Health and Fitness and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment makes her ideally qualified to pioneer a mental health intervention in rural sports clubs. Elle has been working in the rural Victorian City of Wangaratta with the Centre Active Recreation Network (CARN) for 2 years, particularly with rural sporting clubs, engaging them in a range of community development programs to capitalise on the key roles they play in rural communities. Her roles include *Supporting Country Sports Program Coordinator* and *Good Sports Project Officer* for North East Victoria. Currently she is also a *Tennis Victoria Regional Development Officer* and, since October 2009 the *Good Sports, Good Mental Health—Build Your Game Project Coordinator* for North East Victoria. Elle will share her experience in delivering a mental health and alcohol awareness program to sports clubs throughout the major regional cities and towns of Wangaratta and Wodonga and the rural shires and communities of Indigo, Towong and Alpine.

Background

This paper outlines the development of the *Good Sports, Good Mental Health—Build Your Game* program, developed by the Australian Drug Foundation in conjunction with *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*. The paper provides a background and rationale to the development of *Build Your Game Phase 1* and describes how it is implemented by regional providers in rural Victoria and New South Wales.

Australian Drug Foundation

Celebrating 50 years of service to the community, the Australian Drug Foundation is Australia's leading body committed to preventing alcohol and other drug problems in communities around the nation.

The Foundation reaches more than a million Australians through community sporting clubs and also works with a wide range of Australians through governments, workplaces, health care settings and schools, offering educational information and campaigning for healthy and strong communities. The Foundation has a strong influence through its work in the community, through policy and advocacy and by providing information services.

The Foundation recognised that promoting responsible alcohol use would benefit from encouraging good mental health and vice versa. The Foundation also saw that rural and regional communities were isolated from ready access to health information and mental health services.

Sporting clubs are vital to community connectedness, especially in rural and remote settings. The Foundation's *Good Sports* program was proposed as a means by which rural communities could develop the capacity to recognise the links between good mental health and responsible alcohol use and how to get help when problems are identified.

Good Sports Program

Good Sports is a national sports development initiative of the Australian Drug Foundation. It is a free program available to all community sports clubs. The primary aim of *Good Sports* is to implement structural change within amateur sporting clubs in order to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related problems. It does this through a three-level accreditation program.

The specific objectives of the *Good Sports* program are to:

- ensure that sports clubs that sell, or serve alcohol, do so according to the relevant liquor licensing laws and regulations;
- implement a set of criteria and policies regarding the use and promotion of alcohol;
- prevent the occurrence of alcohol-related problems arising out of the unsafe and irresponsible use of alcohol at amateur sports clubs.
- increase club viability through increased club participation and community participation.

Good Sports is now in its 10th year and has just over participating 4,000 clubs.

Good Sports, Good Mental Health—Build Your Game

Good Sports, Good Mental Health—Build Your Game addresses comorbidity issues in rural Australian communities through building capacity in rural sports clubs to engage with their communities and local health services. The principle of the program is to work through rural sports clubs to raise awareness about depression and anxiety and related alcohol use and promote help-seeking behaviour.

The program was initially piloted in 2008 with support from *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* in two sites in rural and regional Victoria. Following the pilot, *beyondblue* joined with the Foundation to deliver and evaluate *Build Your Game Phase 1* to 400 rural sports clubs in northern Victoria and southern and south west New South Wales. *Phase 1* began in May 2009 and will be completed in October 2011.

Build Your Game is also being delivered in Tasmania under a funding partnership comprising the Australian Drug Foundation, the Tasmanian Government, the Hobart City, Clarence City and Derwent Valley Councils and *beyondblue*.

Mental health in rural communities

Comorbidity

For this project, 'comorbidity' refers to the co-existence of an alcohol or other drug problem and a mental health disorder. The links between good mental health and responsible alcohol use are not well understood in the community and not seen to be effectively addressed in communities by the service sector.

Research suggests that:

- 10% of the Australian population experiences a substance use disorder with a mental health condition in a 12 month period; and
- 20–30% of Australians will experience comorbidity at some time in their lives.¹

Alcohol and other drug problems frequently occur with mental health problems (such as depression or anxiety). Research quoted in the *ADF DrugInfo Suite No 21* (November 2007)^{2 3 4 5} indicates 29% of people living with a mental health disorder have a coexisting substance use disorder. A study of people receiving treatment for depression⁶ found that between 40–70% also had a substance use disorder.

There are a few reasons why this might be. People with depression or anxiety may use alcohol or other drugs to manage their symptoms. Depression or psychosis could be triggered by cannabis or amphetamine use. Someone misusing alcohol or other drugs may find their social and financial life deteriorates, which can lead to depression if their quality of life suffers.

Rationale for a rural mental health intervention

Young men aged 18-24 are high-risk consumers of alcohol and are over-represented in suicide statistics.⁷

Between 1996 and 2005, it is estimated that 32,696 Australians died from alcohol-attributed injury and/or disease stemming from risky or high-risk drinking. In the same period, an estimated 813,072 Australians were hospitalised for similar reasons.⁷

For young Australians (15-24 year olds) alcohol is a major contributing cause of death or injury, particularly for those living in non-metropolitan areas.⁸

In 2007, one in five Australians (29.6%) surveyed for the *NDSHS 2007*⁹ experienced an incident where they were the victim of alcohol-related harm such as:

- verbal abuse
- physical abuse
- put in fear.

The highest rate of such incidents was for 20-29 year olds (45.3%) with elevated rates also recorded for 14-19 year olds (33.4%) and 30-39 year olds (32.6%).⁹

The relationship between alcohol and violence is strongly supported by evidence and several factors have been identified which can predict, or characterise alcohol-related violence.¹⁰

These factors include (but are not limited to):

- being young, single and male.
- (for young people) living in rural areas.
- (for young males) being in pubs, clubs or out in entertainment precincts.
- alcohol-related assaults commonly occurring between 9pm and 3am on Friday and Saturday nights.
- seasonal changes, calendar events and significant sporting events.

Working directly with sporting clubs can enable contact with younger, at-risk men and the important mentors and elders who are setting standards in club environments.

Build your Game program

Build Your Game is a pioneering program raising community awareness of depression and anxiety and related alcohol problems through rural sporting clubs in 2010 and 2011.

The anticipated outcome of *Build Your Game* is that people in sports clubs and their local communities learn to talk as comfortably about mental health as they do about physical health. Rural communities will be empowered by knowledge and experience to approach someone at risk with effective advice to make contact with the local service providers who have participated in the program.

Build Your Game takes on board criticisms of rural health promotion initiatives that are seen as fly-in-fly-out by rural communities and is working to build a lasting legacy of capacity building for each club and community involved.

In Victoria, *Build Your Game* is being delivered for the Foundation by the following Community Partners:

- Mallee Sports Assembly—in the regional centres of Mildura, Swan Hill, Wycheproof and surrounding communities
- Northern District Community Health Service—in the town of Kerang and surrounding communities

- Sports Focus—in the regional City of Greater Bendigo and surrounding communities
- Valley Sports Assembly—in the Regional City of Shepparton and surrounding communities
- Centre for Active Recreation Network (CARN)—in the Regional City of Wangaratta and surrounding communities.

To deliver the program locally each Community Partner was required to identify a group of local health and government agencies who could provide advice and networking opportunities for the duration of the Partners' contracts. All Community Partners were already participating in local health and information networks before contracting to deliver *Build Your Game*.

New South Wales does not have the Sports Assembly infrastructure to replicate the Victorian rollout of *Build Your Game*. The Foundation directly employs Community Development Officers to work in the cities of Albury and Wagga Wagga and surrounding communities. This 'NSW model' is also used in Tasmania.

Build Your Game works extensively with local knowledge and experience. The program is more a framework than a template for developing awareness interventions about depression and anxiety and related alcohol use. Each club is invited to develop their own response to participating in the program. The role of the Project Officers is to ensure that a consistent set of interventions are delivered to each participating club.

Through involvement in the program interventions clubs learn to recognise the signs of depression and anxiety and their relationship to alcohol use. Clubs become 'go to' places for their communities in providing critical information on mental health and alcohol use and also in providing advice on how to support someone in seeking help.

The four interventions clubs are invited to participate in are:

- **Host an information site** Clubs order information from *beyondblue* and the Foundation. This is typically provided as a 'Bluey' (*beyondblue* portable stand) which comes stocked with information. Club members learn to be self-sufficient in reviewing the information and refreshing it according to club and community needs from a range of providers.
- **Local Services Audit.** Each *Build Your Game* club is supported in learning about local mental health service providers and encouraged to make contact with these providers. The purpose is three-fold:
 - First, to advise clubs members and visitors of existing local services and to post their contacts on the club premises;
 - Second, to advise the services that the club is actively promoting them to people looking for support; and
 - Third, to encourage the services to visit the clubs and speak about their work.

As Community Partners are in contact with local services for advisory support and information sharing, the Partners have access to health directories and access information that can be passed directly to clubs. The Partners' task is then to help each club to make themselves known to their local services and invite them in.

- **Club events.** Clubs are invited to host events where the critical facts about depression, anxiety and related alcohol use are given out, along with simple advice on how to recognise and support a mate who needs a hand. In practice, events quickly became identified as 'Blue Rounds'. A Blue Round is where clubs hold matches where teams, sports equipment and anything within reach are coloured, or covered over in blue. These events typically attract positive local media attention, further cementing the clubs' role as a provider of mental health awareness in their communities.

The Critical Facts about depression and anxiety and related alcohol use are designed to be read out at an event as a 'script' by a lay person, or to guide a health specialist in ensuring the correct (and consistent) information and advice is given out at a *Build Your Game* intervention. Consistency of information delivery is important for the evaluation of the program.

The Critical Facts cover:

- Prevalence of depression and anxiety.
 - Talking about alcohol and mental health.
 - Where to go for help and how to offer help.
 - Safe drinking figures.
 - Effects of alcohol on mental health.
 - What is stress and how it differs from depression.
- **Mental Health Awareness Training.** Two or more members of each club are invited to participate in the three-hour, Sports Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT) program delivered by *beyondblue*. This program is a development of the short-course, mental health awareness program *beyondblue* developed and delivered for rural communities as a drought support initiative. Club members with this training make themselves available to their clubs and communities to talk about assisting someone in seeking help.

Evaluation

The major pre- and post-evaluation of *Build Your Game* is being managed by the Australian Drug Foundation Research Team. Over 500 respondents were contacted for interview through a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) process before any had participated in the *Build Your Game* program. The CATI questions were developed in consultation with *beyondblue* to match the *beyondblue* Depression Monitor data set, a major community survey that is carried out by *beyondblue* every two years. Topline results from the CATI evaluation will be available in late March, with the second interview and evaluation process to be completed by October 2011.

Working with rural sports clubs

A rural sports club becomes involved in *Build Your Game* by inviting the local Project Officer to present to the club committee. *Build Your Game* Program Officers typically get five or ten minutes on a club committee meeting agenda. In that time, the Project Officer needs to be able to talk about the rationale for offering a mental health intervention program to the club and present the structure of *Build Your Game* participation to the committee.

The Foundation works with Community Partners and Project Officers who are already experienced in delivering community health promotion initiatives through the Foundation's *Good Sports* program. The Project Officer targets a range of clubs and not just those participating in *Good Sports*. It is not uncommon for clubs to seek a presentation on *Build Your Game* after having learnt about the program in their area through the media, or word of mouth.

In practice, the *Build Your Game* Program Officer works directly with clubs to:

- help club members look at local issues about mental health.
- develop a club's own *Build Your Game* Action Program.
- encourage families to join in safe and healthy activities where mental health is talked about as comfortably as physical health.
- enrol club leaders in the *beyondblue* Sports Mental Health Awareness Training course.
- help clubs get a better understanding of depression, anxiety and alcohol use in general.

The benefits for a rural club is that the club:

- becomes a local info hub on mental health and responsible drinking.
- builds long-lasting community relationships and makes ongoing support and referral contacts.

- keeps in touch with information from the Australian Drug Foundation, *beyondblue* and other sources, which they identify for themselves.
- supports its own members by promoting good mental health with responsible alcohol use.

Opportunities for the future

A key target group for *Build Your Game* is young men aged 18–24. The program actively engages with this cohort in the context of engaging whole clubs and their local communities. Once a club has completed its four program interventions, it is anticipated they will be ready to maintain their ‘health promotion’ outlook.

On completing the four interventions, clubs will be invited to focus on their younger cohorts, including the impressionable Under 18 players and members. A potential intervention would be to support clubs in providing youth-specific information provided by the Australian Drug Foundation and *youthbeyondblue*.

This initiative could be extended to take on a men’s health promotion focus (some clubs having already held men’s health nights as a program intervention). In this context, the issues of older men, mental health and alcohol use could also be investigated.

Summary

Following the long-standing success the *Good Sports* program of alcohol prevention and harm minimisation in sports clubs, *Good Sports, Good Mental Health—Build Your Game Phase 1* is engaging clubs in determining their own mental health awareness needs and supporting them in implementing a range of practical intervention responses.

In particular, clubs are linked with local support services, in turn providing these services with new opportunities to engage in health promotion with communities. Clubs become ‘go to’ places for communities and services to share information and support over the longer term.

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